

# **Relaunched BSM in Laredo an answer to prayer**

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LAREDO—Texas A&M International University has a revived Baptist Student Ministry after several years of limited gospel witness on the campus. And many individuals and churches in Laredo see it as the answer to their prayers.

Ben Karner, pastor of First Baptist Church in Laredo, recalled church members gathering three years ago to pray for someone to engage in gospel work on the university campus.

## **‘Praying for God to send someone’**

“Laredo is a mission field,” Karner said. “There are international students from around the world, and we had no gospel witness on campus that was recognizable. We started praying for God to send someone.”

The church continued to pray over the next two years and others around the city joined in that prayer.

During the spring semester 2018, several people contacted Ginger Bowman, BSM church life specialist with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, to explore the possibility of starting a BSM at TAMIU.

At least three people—Jonathan Aragon, then pastor of United Baptist Church in Laredo; Logan Williams, associate pastor from First Baptist in Laredo; and Abigail Vela, a student from Texas A&M Kingsville who transferred to the Laredo school—inquired separately about launching a collegiate ministry.

Bowman sensed God was stirring the hearts of people to begin a new campus ministry and traveled to Laredo last fall to meet with others who might want to join in the effort.



Texas A&M International University in Laredo, represented in this photo by the Sue and Radcliffe Killam Library, lacked a significant gospel witness on campus until the Baptist Student Ministry relaunched. (Photo / Jeremy Sharp)

When Bowman went to the TAMIU campus, she met several students—including Vela, Rudy Delagarza and Ruth Ortiz—who were passionate about seeing their classmates and friends reached with the gospel.

By the end of the fall semester, they began paperwork to be recognized officially as a student organization.

During the spring semester, more than 20 BSM students met weekly for Bible study, discipleship, worship and evangelism training.

Through a grant from the Texas Baptist Missions Foundation, the BSM purchased Bibles and other discipleship materials. The funds also will be used for ministry expenses and funding for a campus missionary.

In January, Vela and Delagarza identified several other student leaders to begin a leadership team and cast a vision for the campus ministry.

## God prepared a campus missionary

Two hours away, at Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Joel Barrera was working as a campus missionary intern. He was approached by his director about the possibility of going to help the BSM launch at TAMIU.



Joel Barrera, a campus ministry intern, works with the Baptist Student Ministry at Texas A&M International University in Laredo. (Photo / Jeremy Sharp)

Barrera became a Christian at age 19 as a student at Texas A&M Kingsville. He became involved in the BSM as a leader. After graduation, he committed to serve as a campus missionary.

When he heard about the opportunity to begin new work on a campus in

need of the gospel, he prayed and asked God for direction.

“When I heard there was no gospel movement, no disciple-making, and no leadership, the potential to help lead excited me,” Barrera said. “Most people run away from brokenness. It’s a dark campus, but I wanted to run towards that.”

In April, Barrera began traveling to Laredo every week to meet with students. Together, the student leaders and Barrera cast a vision for the BSM at TAMIU.

The BSM desires to be grounded and rooted in the gospel, community, prayer and missions, Barrera emphasized.

“My job is to train and equip the students to do the work,” he said. “I’m giving them tools and showing them how to evangelize. I’m also trying to be that example for them. That’s how I believe God is going to grow us—by working as a team.”

As the students began to meet, churches in Laredo overwhelmingly responded with desires to support the work in any way needed.

“We are excited that this started naturally by the students themselves,” said Ruben Harrison, associate pastor at Primera Iglesia Bautista in Laredo. “We’ve noticed a lot of ownership by the students. ... It has a lot of impact on the campus, because the students are leading it and looking for organic growth.”

## **‘We love what God is doing’**

John David Delgado, who became pastor of United Baptist Church in Laredo in January, previously served 11 years in campus ministry.

Within his first few days in the city, Delgado called Vela and told her that

United Baptist would be there to support and encourage the new BSM. The university's president and several staff members attend and serve in leadership at the church, and several students attend as well.

"We are invested in supporting the school. We love what God is doing," Delgado said. "We will do anything we can to be a support and encourage the BSM to move forward."

Karner noted it is difficult for churches to have a presence on the campus without a natural invitation from students.

"The BSM is vital on campus, because it gives a way to reach into lives that we would otherwise have no contact with," he said. "Those [BSM] students have the ability to reach into lives. If we can reach students, imagine what the results could be."

Over the last month, the BSM leadership intentionally visited United Baptist, First Baptist and Primera Iglesia Bautista to share their vision for campus ministry. The churches all welcomed the students with open arms, each taking time in their worship services to pray for their work and ask God to move in a mighty way on the TAMIU campus.

While in many ways the work has just started at TAMIU, God has been raising up workers to serve the campus and support the new BSM, Barrera noted.

"I want people to know that God is moving already in Laredo and I'm really excited to see what God is going to do in our university and our city," he said. "Please continue praying for us. I'm super excited to see what God will do."